

A DISCOURSE

On the Death of

WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON,

LATE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES;

DELIVERED BEFORE THE TWO HOUSES OF THE LEGISLATURE OF
THE STATE OF NEW-YORK,

IN ST. PETER'S CHURCH, ALBANY,

On the 25th Day of April, 1841;

BY THE

REV. HORATIO POTTER, D.D.

RECTOR OF SAID CHURCH.



ALBANY:

PRINTED BY HOFFMAN, WHITE AND VISSCHER.

.....
1841.



STATE OF NEW-YORK.

IN SENATE, April 26, 1841.

Resolved, That the thanks of the Senate and Assembly be presented to the Rev. HORATIO POTTER, D.D. for the able, eloquent, and appropriate discourse delivered before them on the twenty-fifth instant, in commemoration of the lamented death of WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON, late President of the United States ; that he be respectfully requested to furnish a copy thereof for publication ; and that the joint committee appointed the sixth instant, on the message of his Excellency the Governor, do carry this resolution into effect.

BY ORDER.

SAMUEL G. ANDREWS, *Clerk*.

IN ASSEMBLY, April 26, 1841.

Resolved, That the Assembly do concur with the Senate in the above resolution.

BY ORDER.

P. B. PRINDLE, *Clerk*.

To the Rev. HORATIO POTTER, D.D.

SIR,

IN obedience to a joint resolution of the Senate and Assembly of the State of New-York, the subscribers take pleasure in presenting to you the unanimous thanks of the two Houses, for the able, eloquent, and appropriate discourse delivered before them on the twenty-fifth instant, in commemoration of the lamented death of **WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON**, late President of the United States ; and do respectfully request of you the favor to furnish them with a copy thereof for publication.

With great regard,

We have the honor to be,

Your obedient servants,

**JOHN W. TAYLOR,
HENRY A. FOSTER,
G. FURMAN,**

} *On the part of the
Senate.*

**JOHN M. HOLLEY,
JEREMIAH JOHNSON,
W. TAYLOR,
MICHAEL HOFFMAN,
GEORGE A. SIMMONS,**

} *On the part of the
Assembly.*

GENTLEMEN,

I HAVE received, with much sensibility, your communication, presenting the unanimous thanks of the two houses of the Legislature for my discourse delivered before them on the twenty-fifth instant, and requesting a copy thereof for publication. The kindness and indulgence, and I will add the serious attention, with which this effort to serve them has been received, demand my respectful acknowledgments ; and I venture to offer them, as for myself, so also in behalf of Religion and of the Country—both being equally benefited by every act of homage toward the Governor of the Universe, proceeding from those who are in authority. Though generally reluctant to commit occasional discourses to the Press, I do not feel myself at liberty to decline a request presented as yours is. In acceding to it, I can only pray that words spoken with simplicity and sincerity may, through a higher agency, become words of power.

With great respect and regard,

I have the honor to be,

Your obliged humble servant,

HORATIO POTTER

Albany, April 30, 1841.

The Hon. JOHN W. TAYLOR,
The Hon. HENRY A. FOSTER,
The Hon. G. FURMAN,

} *Committee on the part of the Senate.*

The Hon. JOHN M. HOLLEY,
The Hon. JEREMIAH JOHNSON,
The Hon. W. TAYLOR,
The Hon. MICHAEL HOFFMAN,
The Hon. GEORGE A. SIMMONS,

} *Committee on the part of the Assembly*

DISCOURSE.

GENTLEMEN OF THE SENATE,
AND OF THE ASSEMBLY :

IN confiding to one of your chaplains, rather than to one of your own number, the duty which I rise to attempt to discharge, I have supposed that you intended to intimate your wish, that the discourse to be pronounced might be of a religious, and not of a political or historical character ; that in considering the bereavement under which the nation mourns, prominence might be given, not so much to the person as to the event. Acquiescing in a view of this exercise, which accords so well with my own tastes and feelings, I shall not repeat what you already know much better than myself, of the services and the worth of a departed PATRIOT, SOLDIER and STATESMAN, but endea-

vor, by some very simple reflections, to turn your thoughts toward Him from whom this national monition proceeded. And O Thou, in whose presence we now appear, unto whom all hearts are open, pardon our sins, tranquilize our spirits, and help us to profit by the lesson which thou art giving us; we ask it for Christ's sake.

Hear the words of a royal preacher, recorded in the book of Ecclesiastes, first chapter and second verse :

“VANITY OF VANITIES, *saith the preacher*, VANITY OF VANITIES; ALL IS VANITY.”

You will perhaps demand of me, why I come before you with a sentiment so trite, and yet so paradoxical—so far removed from those practical views of life, which are generally prevalent, and which, it may be thought, are alone worthy of the attention of Statesmen and Rulers. I can only lay my hand upon my mouth, and declare that I say nothing of myself; that I do but echo the voice of God as it speaks to us emphatically in his Word, and, if I may venture to say so, still more impressively in his Providence. If ever there was a dispensation in which it was the manifest design of God to teach us, that “every man living, in his

best estate, is altogether vanity," such is the one which has called us together this evening. For what has happened? Why is it that an humble minister of religion is called forth from his retirement, and commanded to address the Legislature of the State? Why is it that our consecrated Temples, our Halls of Legislation, and our Courts of Justice are hung in black; and that every where, throughout the length and breadth of the land, funeral processions meet the eye, and the sound of the muffled drum falls sadly upon the ear; while from the suspension of business, the cessation of political strife, and the softened tone of public feeling, a stranger would have said, 'the land is in mourning: there cannot be a house in which there is not one dead'? What is it that has thus bowed the hearts of all this people in awe and sadness, as the heart of one man? Why, suddenly, in a most unexpected moment, the Supreme Governor of the Universe has been seen putting forth his hand through clouds and darkness, to take out of this world, in the first month of his exaltation to power, the Chief Magistrate of a great nation! Yes! even in the midst of triumphs and gratulations, at the very commence-

ment of a new political era ; while one part of the country is eager with hope and expectation, and the other part is looking on with doubt and mistrust ; while all are waiting for the developments of a new policy, he, on whom every eye is fixed, is summoned from the cabinet, and from the chair of state, to the bed of death ; and the multitudes who so lately thronged the capital of the nation, to witness his induction into the highest office in their gift, are scarcely dispersed, have not all reached their respective homes, when they are overtaken by tidings that the man whom they have been so anxious to elevate, from whose elevation they have hoped so much, is no more !

Think of the scenes that have been witnessed in the streets of Washington since the beginning of the last month. The inhabitants of that city, who but a few days ago crowded to the Capitol to witness the august ceremony of Inauguration, or who thronged the sides of that great Avenue through which the brilliant pageant was to move, for the purpose of hailing with acclamations the venerable Warrior, now become their chief Ruler ; these inhabitants, I say, have scarcely retired to their firesides, and had time to recover from the

excitement of that occasion, before they are summoned to come forth and look upon another pageant, upon another procession ! The elements that compose it are, in many respects, the same as before ; but the air, the spirit of the whole, how mournfully changed ! Ministers of state, and foreign ambassadors, and distinguished citizens and strangers, are again to be seen ; but every trace of joy and gratulation is fled. The same martial, well disciplined ranks are there ; but their arms are reversed, their countenances are bent in gloom upon the ground, their step is measured and solemn ; the drum is still heard, but in muffled tones ; their music is low and funereal : the horse too, which made a principal figure on the previous occasion, is there ; but the seat of the rider is vacant, and the hearse that follows tells but too plainly that **DEATH** is now the Conqueror, and that all that remains to them of their loved and venerated chief is contained in a coffin, and about to be consigned to the tomb !

And could nothing save him ? He in whom so many expectations centered ? He whose spirit was buoyed up by the prayers and the good wishes of a nation ? He who had been raised up as if for

some special purpose, but whose measures were yet undeveloped, and whose services, therefore, appeared so important ? He, in fine, who had but just reached the pinnacle of human greatness, so far as it consists in official station, reached it with a mind and a body which seemed to have defied time and hardship ? Could nothing save him, even for a brief period, to the work for which he had been chosen ? Neither health, nor buoyant spirits, nor elevated station just attained ? Neither the interests nor the expectations, the prayers nor the esteem of a great people ? No ! His hour had come ! The decree had gone forth from a higher power ; and it mattered not that the council of the nation was summoned to meet him at an early day ; it mattered not that the festival of the Resurrection was near at hand, when, as he had intimated to his spiritual Pastor, while yet in health, it would be his desire to shew forth the death of his Redeemer, and to feed upon the spiritual food of his most precious body and blood, in the sacrament ; it mattered not that the aged partner of his bosom was far away, totally unprepared for such a bereavement, unconscious of the fearful shock that awaited her, and instead of flying to receive his

parting breath, engaged perhaps in perusing the tributes paid to the virtues and station of her honored husband; in a word, it mattered not that two short months would suffice to discharge so many duties toward the state and toward religion, and to afford so much mitigation to distress in the family; the messenger of death would not wait; and it seems as if nothing remained to us, but to stand over the grave, and cry aloud to a giddy, ambitious world, "Vanity of vanities! vanity of vanities! all is vanity!"

The sentiment will be echoed by that aged widow, who had been looking forward to this year, more for her husband than for herself, as the proudest of her life! It will be echoed by those members of the national council, who, in another month, will return to the seat of government, not to greet the venerated President in the splendid mansion, where they left him in health a few weeks since, but to seek out and visit the spot where repose his mortal remains. The people of this great nation, who have been contending for and against his elevation, but who are now uniting with a cordiality and sensibility that do them honour in testifying their respect for his memory,

they too will see in this dispensation proof most affecting that life is made up of illusions, and that "every man living, in his best estate, is altogether vanity."

The triteness of the truth will not prevent them from laying it to heart. In their hours of retirement, they will say to themselves, What, then, is *health*, which, though never so vigorous in appearance, may thus vanish in a moment? What is mind, intellectual energy, which to-day grasps the complicated affairs of a nation, and to-morrow becomes feeble as infancy, or absolutely incoherent under the pressure of a decaying body? What are the objects of human ambition? Popularity and power and station, which the multitude toil after at every sacrifice through their whole lives, which thousands fail to attain, and which can thus elude the grasp of the one favored mortal in the first month of anticipated enjoyment! Can any thing be more deceptive, more unsubstantial, more unworthy of the supreme regard of an immortal being? What indeed is life, viewed in the light of such an event, but a feverish and hurried dream, in which we are busied with toys and bubbles, and from which we are every moment liable to wake

up in eternity? Truly, "Man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain." "His days are made as it were a span long." "He cometh up, and is cut down like a flower." "His age is even as nothing, in respect of the years of the Most High; and considered simply in reference to temporal things, every thing about him seems mutable, insignificant, vain."

Such is the lesson, which, as it seems to me, Providence designs to teach us in the dispensation that engages our attention this evening. Is there not a cause? Our country is intensely occupied with "things that perish in the using." From one end to the other, it is convulsed with political excitement, and stimulated almost to madness in the pursuit of wealth and power. The thoughts and affections of our people are strongly set "upon things on the earth," not merely to use them with moderation, with a just sense of their gross and perishable nature, but to treat them as the heathen treats the stock of the tree that he hews down in the forest; one part whereof he burns in the fire for a legitimate use, to relieve his physical necessities—to warm himself, and to roast flesh that he may eat; while of the other part, forgetting its

base and worthless nature, he carves out for himself a god, and falls down to worship it ! Thus is it that we *use*, and at the same time *idolize* temporal objects. By how many, for example, is property viewed, not merely in reference to its legitimate uses, but as the supreme object of life, before which every thing else, elevated sentiment, health, domestic enjoyment, tranquillity of mind, peace of conscience, is to be sacrificed ? How often are political employments regarded, not as public duties, which we owe to the state, and which therefore we may not altogether decline, but as something which involves the highest good of earth — something which we may appropriate to ourselves, and for the sake of which we may reasonably plot and slave from the beginning to the end of life ? Doubtless I see before me many honorable exceptions to both these remarks. I am far from supposing that public virtue is extinct among us ; on the contrary, it is reasonable to presume that conscientious devotion to the public good is much more common than might be inferred from the representations made by different parties of each other's conduct and motives. Nevertheless, you will probably agree with me, that

discontent with the condition in which Providence has cast our lot, *inordinate desire* for superior worldly advantages, *self-will* and *impetuosity* in the pursuit of them, too little controlled by sound principle or by just views of human happiness and dignity—a prevalent disregard, both in public and in private, of the Superintending Providence of God, are features but too prominent in the character of our country.

Is it not to arrest these dangerous tendencies—is it not to rebuke these sins, that the Most High has suddenly made bare his holy arm in the sight of all our land? Never before, since the first organization of our government, has He spoken to us, as a nation, so emphatically. We often witness a dispensation, which seems peculiarly fitted to arrest the attention of an individual, of a family, of a community; but here is one in which God appears to design nothing less than the conversion of a great and favored people! It possesses many of the qualities of a *miracle*; of one of those marvellous events, by which the invisible Governor of the universe authenticates a special message to the children of men, and calls upon the world to listen to the voice of truth. It may almost be

called a violation or suspension of established laws. Hitherto our chief magistrates have not only attained to a good old age, but they have lived to finish their public duties, and to enjoy for a considerable period the pleasures and advantages of a dignified retirement and leisure. Never before has Death been permitted to interfere with the highest functions of our government ; and even now, had the interference occurred in the middle of an official term, had it occurred in the case of one whose administration involved nothing new or exciting, the event would have appeared less significant. But when we see, for the first time, a popular chief magistrate suddenly removed by death, in the very beginning of his administration, when he has but just reached his seat and commenced his high duties ; at a time too, when, in consequence of recent political changes and of the peculiar condition of the country, his measures are looked for with intense interest ; what is it but a solemn intimation from God, given under circumstances to command attention, that he will have us to remember him ? An intimation that there is a power above us greater than ours ; and that when our way is perverse before him, he can

easily make all our devices to be of none effect ? What is it but a most instructive lesson to those who profess to doubt whether God interferes to control the destinies of nations ; who find it difficult to conceive how, without restraining the free agency of man, the Most High *can* so diffuse his power through the operations of the world, and so combine contingent events as to work out any required result ? Here by one stroke, by removing one pivot from the great political system, one life, than which nothing can be more uncertain, nothing more easily destroyed ; by so combining causes as to impair the rest or to change the secretions of one human body, the whole aspect of things is changed, and the government of a great nation, in a time of peculiar suspense and expectation, is confided to hands which the people can scarcely be said to have had in their thoughts ! Analogous to this, is a still more striking instance that occurred at an early period of our history. In that deplorable defeat, in which he, who afterwards became the master spirit of our revolution, first signalized his valour and his consummate prudence, his horse was twice shot under him, and his clothes were perforated by four bullets. In

the confusion of that hour, therefore, had his heroic efforts changed but a little the position of his person, had the aim of any one of his numerous assailants been turned but a hair's breadth to the right or to the left, had the force of the wind been a little more or a little less effective, things all easily controlled by a higher power, without attracting our notice or interfering with our agency, then he whom we now revere as the Father of our country, as under God the Saviour of our Republic, had died almost without a name, and our armies, our counsels, our first doubtful but decisive steps as a nation had been swayed by other spirits.

Standing then in the light of such manifestations of the power of God's special providence, would you behold a melancholy spectacle of "vanity"? Observe the inhabitants of the earth busy with their little plans, plotting and counterplotting, projecting as if *they* were supreme, while He that sitteth in the Heavens, looking down upon their puny efforts, is ready to laugh them to scorn; or if he beholds them, as indeed he does, with pity, is nevertheless strong and prompt to modify their doings, to reverse their schemes when in-

consistent with his purposes, to turn their cunning into foolishness, and to make even the wrath of man to praise him. Thus is it, that, if we look upon man, upon society, or upon nations as they appear without religion, without faith in God, without reverence for his holy will, nothing meets the eye but littleness and folly : We see men and nations walking in a vain shadow and disquieting themselves in vain, spending their labour for nought ; and we exclaim with the royal sage of Israel, "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities ; all is vanity !"

Nor is this all. Behold in the history of the last month, how insignificant and how unnecessary to the interests of this world are those instruments that to men seem most important ! Within less than thirty days, he, whose loss a nation deplores, was actively engaged in discharging the functions of his high office. His life seemed to be necessary to the country ; indispensable to the carrying out of those principles and measures, of which he was the chosen representative, and which the people had determined to try. When his death was first announced to the astonished nation, it was felt not only that a great and good man was taken away ;

not only that the venerated statesman and soldier, who had been elevated with so much feeling, who had drawn toward himself no small portion of the patriotism and loyalty of the country, was no more; but that the administration of the government was liable to be deeply embarrassed, and perhaps the wishes of the people defeated or postponed. And yet one short week has scarcely elapsed, the tomb has but just closed over the mortal remains of the departed Chief Magistrate, when the country settles down in the conviction, that however much the sensibilities of the nation may have been shocked, or its anticipations disappointed; however much it may lament the loss of a Ruler, whose pure and simple virtues had endeared him to millions of hearts; yet that from that sad event the public interests are to suffer no material detriment, and that all things will proceed precisely as they would have done had death made no change in the highest office in the Union.

Of the character of the principles and policy now adverted to, I have nothing to say. It may be, that their real worth and importance have been greatly overrated by their advocates. That is a question with which I, at least in this place,

have nothing to do. I speak of them simply as they entered into the existing administration of the country ; an administration from which, having been recently formed under peculiar circumstances, much was expected ; and I ask, Is there not something humbling to the pride of man, is there not something mortifying to our ideas of the importance of human instruments, in the quickness with which the waters have closed over the chief magistrate of the nation, at an important crisis, filling up the sad official breach, supplying all deficiency of service, and leaving our great political system to continue its operations as if nothing had occurred ? Contemplate this example ; and see how easily your services can be dispensed with, how quickly your places can be supplied, and how prone you are to exaggerate the importance of favorite human instruments. To-day, the honored individual fills a space so large in the social system, and performs functions so important, that we deem his services all but indispensable ; to-morrow, "his place can nowhere be found," and his presence, so far as public interests are concerned, is scarcely missed ! Now, while such a view supplies nothing answerable to

our conceptions of true greatness ; while it makes us feel most sensibly, that “every man living, in his best estate, is indeed but vanity ;” it teaches us, at the same time, a lesson of moderation, in reference to our personal aspirations and our political conflicts. It admonishes us to reduce our estimate of the value of power and place ; to consider the insignificance of the prize at which we grasp so eagerly ; and to remember, that he who layeth up treasures only for himself, without being rich toward God, rich in good works, rich in the possession of a sanctified nature, is poor indeed ! As politicians, as public men, prone to attach undue importance to certain preferences, to certain schemes of human device, the voice which now speaks to a bereaved nation, calls upon you to be temperate—temperate in your feelings and measures ; to repress that passionate, impetuous self-will, which forgets the superintendence of Providence, which idolizes the men and measures of to-day, considering nothing too valuable to be sacrificed in their support, and imagining that there can be no salvation for the country save through their agency.

Let me not, however, be misunderstood. To

disparage fervent devotion to principle, or warm-hearted, reverential attachment to patriotic men, who have shewn themselves to be worthy of honour for their public and private virtues, would be unsuited alike to the place in which I stand, and to the audience I address. Such is very far from being my design. It is not indifference to principle or to men, that the Gospel or the occasion inculcates ; but a due moderation in our feelings, judgments and measures ; a just sense of our dependence, as individuals and as a nation, upon a high and righteous Being, without whose blessing nothing is strong, nothing is holy ; a Being whose ways are not as our ways, and who is ever prepared to accomplish his wise purposes by means that have not entered into our thoughts. Here is the great secret of temperance and fortitude. It is a constant recollection of the insignificance of all mere human effort and genius, unless furthered by divine help ; it is a devout reference, in all things, to the will and the control of the Almighty Ruler of Nations ; it is this, and this only, that can enable the patriot to select his instruments without passion, without vain confidence, and to witness their destruction without undue apprehen-

sion. Regarding all his doings as overruled by the Providence of God, trusting in that Providence with all his heart, he will devote himself to the maintenance of what he deems to be right with unwavering zeal and energy, but without impetuosity, without expecting too much from any finite agency, without running into the use of unrighteous means: he will look unto the hills from whence cometh the help of individuals and of nations, and he will do every thing in a spirit of holy trust and submission.

When we undertake to set forth the vanity of man, and the mutability of things temporal, it is fitting that we take our examples from the *high places* of the earth. Proofs drawn from such sources are more convincing than any others, and much more affecting. At the call of Providence, therefore, we have been to look upon the loftiest dwelling in the land, the mansion of our chief magistrate—the object of so much ambition, the occasion of so much envy. A man almost universally revered, enters it amid the blessings and gratulations of a nation. Every thing seems to promise that his official life shall be brilliant and prosperous; his family take possession of their

spacious apartments, and enter upon their domestic duties ; but before he can become familiar with his new home, when his table has scarcely yet been spread, a most unexpected, ghastly messenger appears, changes his countenance, and sends him away ! The mirth of the land is gone ; the people's joy is turned into mourning ; and when, after a few days, we return to look again upon that official mansion, we pass a new-made grave ; we meet the family of him whom the nation had delighted to honour, retiring in tears, without their venerated head ; and we find the princely residence they have left already occupied by other inmates, by a successor in office ! After having witnessed such scenes in the most elevated circle in the land, after having received such a lesson on the vanity and nothingness of all that is most highly prized in the world, we need not descend to more humble stations ; we need not take account of all the disappointments and griefs, the dismal losses, the bitter anguish, mental and physical, to be found in ten thousand private dwellings, rich and poor, around us, in order to be convinced, that if in this life only we have hope, we are, in proportion to our faculties and aspira-

tions, of all beings most insignificant and miserable.

From the lessons of Providence, let us turn, then, for one moment, to the teachings of Inspiration. The moment we open the Sacred Volume, our attention is arrested by one striking peculiarity. This book, which we term the Bible, and which we believe, on good evidence, to be inspired, is not the production of one man. It consists of a great number of separate pieces, composed by different persons, at remote periods of time; and though they all spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, though they were all controlled by inspiration, so far as to be saved from error, and to be guided in expressing the truth which it was made their duty to proclaim, yet each writer has evidently retained his own peculiarities of manner—the forms of expression, the imagery, the cast of sentiment, the turn of thought prompted by his character and by the circumstances in which he lived. Now it is worthy of remark, for I think it shews the wisdom and the goodness of God, that the different writers employed at different times to reveal his will to men, to record his dealings with them, to put forth those sentiments of piety

and virtue which should be fitted to call back the alienated heart to truth and duty, these writers were not all selected from the same class — they were not all taken from the same rank in life. On the contrary, they are representatives of all the great classes that were then known, or that are likely ever to be known to the world: rich and poor, learned and unlearned, high and low, the gentle and the bold, the pupil of Gamaliel and the unlettered fisherman, the publican and the accomplished physician, the shepherd and the monarch; and when they speak, they take views of life, they utter sentiments, they use imagery and language suited to their respective conditions, capacities and habits of thought — suited also to the circumstances of prosperity or affliction in which they were placed at the time. It seems as if God had designed that every member of the human family, through all future time, whatever might be his education, his turn of mind, his rank or his trials, should find in that precious volume instructions and sentiments congenial to his taste and appropriate to his situation. There is, indeed, nothing in any part of that volume, from which all men may not profit; but it seems to

be intended that every heart, high or low, should hear a voice especially suited to engage *its* attention, to awaken its sympathy, and to turn it to the only sources of wisdom and consolation. Considering that the humble and the poor constitute the great majority of the world, we need not be surprised, for this, beside many other reasons, that a large part of the sacred writers are taken from the same class. Apart from their inspiration, and from the momentous nature of the higher truths they were commissioned to proclaim, they are worthy of profound attention, on account of the simplicity, the vividness, the truth to nature, even in little things, with which they speak of the human heart, and of the world around them.

But to *them*, I have not had recourse for a text on the present occasion. Standing over the grave of the chief magistrate of a great nation, who had fallen suddenly in the first month of his exaltation to power, in the midst of gratulations and high anticipations, it was natural that I should turn from the great men of the earth to the great men of the Bible ! Impressed by that solemn proof of the littleness of things temporal, I said to myself, "Let us turn to the Monarchs who have been

taught by the Spirit of God, and see what they, speaking from their thrones, have to say of man and of human life." I consulted, first, King David, than whom, independently of his spiritual gifts, a more exquisite and splendid genius never adorned a throne. He had passed from the shepherd's crook to the Sceptre of Israel. He had seen life, and, as his varied and wonderful productions testify, had looked upon it with a thoughtful eye, in all its aspects. Among a thousand other similar sentiments, conceived and expressed with exquisite beauty and pathos, I found those words already cited several times in this discourse. They contain no poetical exaggeration, but are addressed with the utmost solemnity to God. "Thou hast made my days as it were a span long, and mine age is even as nothing in respect of thee. Man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain. He heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them; and verily every man living is altogether vanity." From David I passed on to his son and successor Solomon, who, if less distinguished by the ardent poetical temperament, by the beauty and tenderness of mind that characterized the father, was

far more eminent on account of his universal knowledge and his consummate wisdom. On opening his book of Ecclesiastes, I found these words, at the very beginning, as if they expressed the thoughts ever uppermost in his mind ; and when you consider that he was king over God's chosen people — the monarch whose wisdom and magnificence drew princely admirers from distant countries, you will not deem it strange that the speech fixed my attention. Observe, then, King Solomon the admired, the wise, the prosperous, the great, sets himself to preach the world a sermon, for that is the nature of the book ; and forgetting, or lightly esteeming his regal estate, and all that men most covet, he takes for his text these startling words : “Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher ; vanity of vanities, all is vanity !” Apart from religion, every thing is perishable, every thing is infected with evil, every thing is gross, incapable of nourishing and delighting the soul ; and although neither Solomon nor David was an ascetic, nor professed any insensibility to the good things of life ; on the contrary, they were cheerful spirits, as truly devout men usually are, and they threw out many admirable precepts

respecting the right use of temporal blessings ; yet nowhere in other parts of the sacred volume, not even in the writings of publicans and fishermen, do I find the vanity of man and the littleness of all temporal things set forth so vividly, or so constantly insisted on, as in these inspired productions of *Royal Teachers*, King David and King Solomon ! It seems as if their very elevation had made them more deeply sensible, more constantly mindful of the truth, and had made them feel, too, as if they had a right, as if it became *them* especially to proclaim that truth for the instruction of all mankind—to hold it up for the admonition of Rulers and Princes, of the envious and ambitious.

Pointing, then, on the one side to this solemn testimony of kings, and on the other to the place so recently occupied by your late venerated chief magistrate, may I not venture, without arrogance, without any thing like cant or common place, to address you as public men, and entreat you not to spend your labour for that which is not bread ? We have already seen, in the case of him whose loss we mourn, that no adventitious advantages, neither station, nor popularity, nor renown, nor the interests and wishes of a great nation, could

avail to stay the arm of the destroyer, or rather to put off the summons of the all-wise and all-powerful Governor of the Universe. We have seen, too, that all those advantages, together with life itself, were snatched away in the very moment when their utmost enjoyment, if enjoyment it could be called, was promised and anticipated. This of itself might justify us in writing upon every one of them, "Vanity of vanities! vanity of vanities!" But their littleness and emptiness are not yet made fully manifest. Draw near to the departing spirit of the patriot, soldier and statesman, and ask *him* what he thinks, now, in view of death, of those honours and emoluments, which the world pursues so eagerly, and for which such fearful sacrifices are made? Ask him whether, *as* honours and emoluments, they ever answered his expectations, or satisfied his desires? Ask him whether, in the multitude of the sorrows he has had in his heart, and that every man has in his heart, *they* ever refreshed and delighted his soul? Ask him whether the recollection of having enjoyed them, or the consciousness of being now surrounded by the insignia of power and the plaudits of a nation, contributes at all to

bear up his spirit, or to inspire him with joy as the prospect of eternity opens before him? — But he is gone! Follow him then — follow him to the world of retribution, to the bar of judgment, and ask him, how, from *that point*, appear to him *now* his victories, his triumphs, his honours? Would he weigh them all against one devout prayer, one pious action, however humble — one cup of water given in the name and spirit of the Blessed Redeemer? If his triumphs have been won by righteous means and with noble aims — if they have been enjoyed and used rightly, with moderation, for the good of his country and in the fear of God, they may indeed borrow from religion a worth not inherent in themselves; the remembrance of them may be a comfort in the hour of death, may add to the joys of the eternal world; but apart from the rectitude and piety that ought to pervade them, how vain are they! how incapable of soothing and sustaining the spirit in the hour of sorrow, of disquiet or of dissolution! Unless sanctified by a heavenly spirit, they perish in the using; they trouble and contaminate the soul, without imparting to it one rational joy, and at last they leave it in utter darkness. Wonder not,

then, that an inspired king, who lived in the midst of these temporal glories, who had tried them all, who saw them in the full clear light of divine truth, should exclaim over them, "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Reflect, too, I beseech you, what a view is presented of the spirituality of our nature, of the mysterious dignity and worth of the soul, of the greatness of our moral necessities, when we see that the greatest temporal advantages, the richest possessions, the most dazzling glories of earth, are utterly unavailing to sustain the wounded spirit, to redress its disorders, to satisfy its desires, or even to afford one particle of nourishment for its immortal energies!

Let us hasten, then, to admit that the language of the text needs to be qualified, and its application to be restrained. Man is *not* altogether vanity! He was created in the image of God. His thoughts range through the universe. The adorable Son of the Father came down from Heaven to redeem him with his own precious blood. He is destined for immortality, and is made capable of eternal fellowship with God. If he forget God; if he become the slave of sin, and grovel among

things that perish in the using, then, indeed, his high endowments, his suffering Saviour, and the glorious hopes set before him in the Gospel, only serve to render the vanity of his life the more conspicuous and the more pitiable. But if he remember his Creator and his immortal destiny; if he sanctify his heart in the sight of the Most High; if he abhor that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good, on high and holy principles, then is he truly great — then is he worthy of all reverence, no matter how obscure his station, nor how humble his intellectual endowments. He is exalted not by station, not by talents, not by human applause, but by the *principle* that pervades his efforts, by the *end* for which he lives. This temporal existence, if it lead to nothing better beyond the grave; if it conduct to nothing but disappointment, darkness and despair, *is*, indeed, *the* “vanity of vanities;” but if it be used for the purposes for which it was given, for the glory of God and the good of man’s estate; if it be spent in the simple, straight-forward, devout discharge of duty, it borrows dignity and lustre from the sentiments that adorn it, and from the glory that shall reward and crown it. Indeed, all that So-

lomon says of the vanity of life, is intended to apply to it only as it is spent without religion ; and his words are designed to warn men against the fatal error of taking this world for their portion. It is in no respect answerable to the dignity of their nature : it can never be made to serve their turn : This he demonstrates ; and then announces as the conclusion from all that he knows, by experience or by inspiration, this grand precept : “ Fear God, and keep his commandments ; for this is the whole duty of man.”

Such is the instruction to be derived from that dispensation of Divine Providence, which has darkened the land with sorrow. It teaches us that, apart from the sentiments and the hopes of religion, every man living, in his best estate, is but vanity ; and it calls upon us most pointedly and impressively, “ to fear God and to keep his commandments,” as the only means by which we can rise to dignity or to happiness. It calls upon us as individuals : It calls upon us as a nation. Shall we refuse to receive correction ? Will it not be a sad proof of insensibility, if such a stroke, which ought to move our whole soul, and to recall us to God, should only stun us for a moment ? For him

who is departed, we may well believe, that "to die was gain." He was taken away from the evil to come—away from the temptations and distractions of office. He was removed while his conscience was yet unsullied; while his pious and grateful sentiments, which had been long gaining strength, and which perhaps had been quickened by his recent accession to new honours, were yet fresh and pure. He stood high in favour with men, higher perhaps than he could have stood even after the most successful administration; and when I reflect upon circumstances indicative of the state of his religious principles and feelings; the profound and significant homage paid to Christianity in his Inaugural Address; the spirit manifested in his intercourse with devout persons in private; his manly recognition of religion in his family; his daily reading of the Scriptures, in spite of weariness and interruption; the reverence that marked his attendance upon public worship, and his observance of the Lord's day; the arrangement made with his spiritual Pastor, while yet in health, to receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, on the next occasion of its administration; (alas that it should have been post-

poned so long!) when I reflect upon these traits of a simple but manly piety, and superadd to them the christian spirit with which he saw the approach of death, I rejoice in the precious consolation, that though the nation may and must mourn its own loss, yet it is not left to "sorrow as those that are without hope."

Upon *ourselves*, then, let us turn our thoughts, and endeavour to realize the vanity and uncertainty of every thing that can stand between us and a due preparation for death. During this season of public mourning, one of your own number has been taken away;* as if it was the merciful design of God to touch your hearts while they were yet tender from the previous bereavement. With profound deference, but with solemnity, as in the sight of the Most High, let me beseech you not to turn away from him that speaketh. The night cometh, when no man can work. In a brief period your projects will all be ended, your visions all dissolved. The truths of the Gospel are before you in all their majesty and

* The death of the Hon. Mr. HEATON, a member of the Assembly, had been announced to the Legislature but a few days previous to the delivery of this discourse.

power. You have nothing to oppose to them, but what is suggested not by reason, but by the passions, prejudices and sophistries, which will vanish before an awakened conscience, before the light of eternity, and leave you in the presence of truth, when the truth shall avail only to condemn!

In this connection, permit me to remind you, as public men, that to "fear God and to keep his commandments," is a duty, which you owe to your country no less than to yourselves. I see many before me, many in other official stations in our land, whom I revere for their public and private virtues, and whom I regard as a blessing and an honour to any nation. But what a spectacle would be presented to the world—what an influence would be exerted over our whole political system, could we see our Lawgivers and our Rulers bowing with one accord, with simple, manly, unobtrusive piety, before the altar of the God of Nations; if they were universally known to the world as men of prayer, whose conversation was in heaven, and who were careful to walk before the Most High, and before all the people with simplicity and godly sincerity! Who can doubt that God would smile upon such a nation!

Who can doubt that our millions of freemen would be characterized by a profound reverence for authority ; by a cheerful, holy zeal in the discharge of public and private duties, or that a new virtue would be infused into all our noble institutions ! Within such a land, there could be no decay ; while from abroad, all nations would rise up to do us reverence, and to imitate our example ! Nay, more. Rejecting, as we do, all connection between Religion and the State ; leaving, as the Constitution does, this great source of all conservative influence to the voluntary support which it shall be able to command from individuals — an arrangement, let us bear in mind, which was made, not with a view to expel religion from the land, but in the belief that it would be abundantly supported, and best supported, by confiding it to the spontaneous zeal of its friends, and, I may say, of every citizen ; have we not all come under a peculiar obligation ; have not public men especially come under a most solemn, imperative obligation, to give to religion, what the constitutional arrangements of the country tacitly engaged should be given, namely, the homage of their hearts, and the benefit of their private example and exertions ?

Do you ask how your private influence can be best exerted ? I answer, simply by walking before the Lord with a perfect heart ; by cherishing devout affections ; by acting on high and holy principles ; by being careful to remember, in all your public and in all your private relations, that it is your first duty, as well as your highest honour, to “fear God and to keep his commandments.” *A holy life is the most cogent argument, the most valuable contribution which any man, however exalted by talents or by station, can offer in support of Christianity!* Let me admonish you, in particular, that the *positive institutions of religion*, the Sabbath, the Sanctuary, the Sacraments ; those outward means, by which the honour of God and the influence of his religion are maintained in the world, are ever watched over by him with a jealous eye. The individual or the nation that slights, neglects or desecrates *them*, he will by no means approve ! On the contrary, let these be reverently observed ; let them be delighted in by the rulers and people of the land ; let the spirit of Christianity pervade all your public and private doings, infusing into your counsels, and into your intercourse with each

other, the virtues of justice, temperance, sincerity and charity; imparting to your correspondence with foreign nations a tone of moderation and christian magnanimity; and we have the promise of God, we have the history of the world for our warrant, that integrity and uprightness shall preserve us; we shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty, and his truth will be our shield and our buckler forever!

Without piety in our Lawgivers and Rulers, all the bands of political and social strength are dissolved. For if *they* will not respect and obey God, how can it be supposed that the people will respect and obey them? If they set an example of irreverence and insubordination toward the righteous Governor of the Universe, what shall prevent the people from learning the lesson, and applying it to their feeble and imperfect counsels? Knowing, as we do, that reverence for rightful authority is not a sentiment of spontaneous, or of very easy growth in the perverse heart of man, may we not well fear, that unless our high places shall exhibit illustrious examples of submission and self-devotion, our nation will grow up to be a reproach and a by-word, for the self-will, the

contempt of authority, the lawless violence of its people? And then we, who, *with* religion might have been the wonder and admiration of the world; we, who might have smiled at the power of confederate nations, what shall save us from dishonour? what shall preserve us from destruction!

Nations, be it ever remembered, are not like individuals. Individuals die; but nations live for ever. Individuals, after a brief period of trial, in which the consequences of their moral conduct appear but in part, are called away by the will of God, to enjoy their full reward, or to experience the utmost effects of sin, in a world of eternal retribution. *Their* punishments and *their* recompense are, for the most part, postponed to a future state. *But there is no future state for nations!* They continue to dwell on the earth. Their retribution is in this world. From the very nature of their existence, the consequence of a principle or of a disposition is speedily and fully developed; they flourish or decay; they are exalted and happy, or degraded and miserable, according as they are characterized by piety and virtue, or by impiety and sin. This truth is recorded in awful characters on the history of the Jewish nation:

It is exemplified in the rise and fall of many a kingdom in modern times : It stands out in bold relief on every page of the Sacred Volume : It was written for the admonition of our rulers and our people. If we go to decay, if we fall into dishonour, it must be by our own act. "Be wise now, therefore, O ye Rulers; be instructed, ye that are Judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way : blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." Listen to the voice, which speaks to us, as individuals and as a people, through a great national bereavement ; which says emphatically, "Be ye also ready : "Whosoever honoureth me, him will I also honour." Which says again, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom ; let not the rich man glory in his riches ; let not the mighty man glory in his might ; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth ; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."